

Duxbury Clipper, Thursday, July 15, 1982

POSTSCRIPTS

By JACK POST

The paintings of Gobin Stair, now on exhibit at the Art Complex, are not easy either to look at or to understand. He himself calls them "paintings of consciousness," which he says means that they express his thinking on grief and trouble and hope and love, are about life, his life. These are disturbing paintings, not only for the stark subjects, but because the means of conveying his ideas are not compatible with what most people think of as art. Here before us we see distorted faces, never pretty, seldom perspective; warped bodies, out of scale with their parts and other figures in the picture, in gloomy or startling colors; yet from this welter of unaccustomed expression, meaning leaps at the viewer, almost with a snarl.

This uncomfortable stuff, not what the casual visitor expects to find in an art gallery, and undoubtedly many will go further than not understanding these pictures, they will dislike them, which is a perfectly valid approach, for if you are pleased with colorful flower paintings or realistic ducks swimming in a placid pond, the cynical realism of Stair's interpretations of dark moods can hardly appeal.

Suffice it that here is a stark form of art, expertly presented, each picture with a meaning linked to its title, so that no matter how you feel about the expression, the message comes over when you take the trouble to find it.

Gobin Stair himself is a man of many parts. Until his recent retirement, as editor-in-chief at Beacon Press he published noted and sometimes controversial authors, abstruse and sometimes "difficult" subjects such as the Pentagon Papers; so he was no stranger to contention, and held the courage of his beliefs then as now. Earlier jobs at Beacon Press had included production manager and art director. In a series of prior positions he had designed books, book jackets, catalogues, had worked creatively on his own, sometimes painting, sometimes writing, with shows behind him in the one field and a number of pamphlets and short books to his credit in the other.

In the open spaces of the Art Complex, Stair's paintings produce an almost theatrical effect, and while viewing each picture at close range can teach more, the effect of the powerful heads with triple eyes or repetitive body lines in compelling sequence elicits a mass response strangely at variance with the meaning obtained from a studied close-up of detail. "Wareham Jury," for instance, a product of a trying period of jury duty, reflects close-up the near futility of men judging each other; from across the room, a less personal though no less impressive grouping of figures. "Grief," on the other hand, intensifies the effect of the massed figures, leaning, almost yearning toward the unknown as the viewer moves away from close study to pick up the cumulative power.

Courage is a necessary ingredient of this show, not only for Stair for his forthright expression of often troublesome feelings, but for the people behind the scenes at the Art Complex who ventured to hang so many un-pretty pictures in a rural environment noted for its quiet conservatism. These will not be easily understood or liked any more than were the strange (in their times) early works of Goya and Picasso. Here is not at all the blatant shouting of the slogan "You Gotta Have Arts!", dining into a presumably salable TV audience that it must buy culture just as it must use deodorants or toothpaste with fluorides, promoting sales of "the arts" so that we may experience not artistic satisfaction but a well-rounded economy that would not be complete without music, painting, and the stage. Here, on the contrary, is sincere and original expression, a vitality far more important than pleasing expression in our decorator-adored lives. Hail to a bold step forward in our delightfully ordered community! Like it or not, Gobin Stair's show at the Art Complex is well worth your attention and your study. But be wary in your praise, for he has enough for 2 more shows stacked in his studio.